

OPINION/PAGES

Guest VIEW

Magic Car-bag Dangers of air bags need more awareness

From The San Diego Union-Tribune

Although the potential dangers of air bags are old news, it is clear that many motorists still are ignoring the warnings from automakers and the media.

Air bags already are standard equipment on most new cars.

The federal government has mandated that 90 percent of 1997 model cars have these safety devices, while all new cars must be equipped with them by next year.

In theory, the air bag is a marvelous technology designed to prevent drivers and passengers from being killed or maimed in an accident.

The bags inflate within a fraction of a second during a crash, providing a buffer between the person and the hard interior surfaces of vehicles.

Although most air bags activate upon impact with a solid object at 10 to 12 mph, Mercedes and BMW use different inflation thresholds, depending on whether people are wearing their seat belts.

In practice, air bags explode at a force of up to 200 mph and can kill or maim little children or small adults. They have claimed the lives of about 20 adults and 38 children, most of whom were decapitated.

Most of these fatalities could have been prevented had the children been placed in rear-facing car seats and placed in the vehicle's back seat. That's precisely what safety experts, car seat manufacturers and automotive engineers have been recommending for years.

Small children, especially infants, should never ride in the front seat, where they are vulnerable to the tremendous force of an exploding air bag.

If children and small adults ride in the front, their seats should be adjusted all the way back to reduce the risk of being killed or severely injured when the air bag inflates.

Newspapers have carried various stories and editorials citing the dangers of air bags. Automakers also have been cautioning people who own newer cars of the potential perils.

Still, a majority of Americans believe air bags help more children than they hurt, according to a survey from the Center for Risk Analysis at the Harvard Center for Public Health. In fact, there are no documented cases of air bags saving kids.

To be sure, air bags have saved lives, about 1,500 so far.

But it should be remembered that these safety devices were designed for adults and that special care is needed to protect vulnerable youngsters and small adults from their potentially lethal impact.

Mehsling's VIEW



DN LETTERS

Just a Thought

Several articles and columns were written in the March 19 paper ("Panel Discussion Turns to Arguments About Racism," "Debate heard on gay unions" and J.J. Harder's column, "No more Babel, please"), and I would like to give everyone food for thought by quoting Robert Kennedy from *The Pursuit of Justice*: "What is objectionable, what is dangerous, about extremists is not that they are extreme, but that they are intolerant. The evil is not what they say about their cause, but what they say about their opponents ... Ultimately, America's answer to the intolerant man is diversity, the very diversity which our heritage of religious freedom has inspired."

We can all use the advice from Jessica Kennedy's column "Out on a 'lamb'" (DN, March 19).

"Let go of your prejudices, release your grudges, forgive the unforgivable."

Here is another suggestion, try to see the world from everyone else's eyes.

Erik Sather
freshman
psychology

Responsible Ownership

UNL's Second Amendment Students' Association (SASA) does not find it surprising that some law enforcement officials oppose a concealed carry law in Nebraska (DN, March 18). Other states like Florida, South Carolina and Texas experienced similar skepticism when they enacted comparable laws.

However, many of these same officials have since realized that mentally competent and law-abiding citizens are perfectly capable of



Convenient Memory

As our nation goes into a cult panic over the mass suicides in California, let's remember a couple of things.

First, that this kind of mind control isn't limited to tiny, marginalized groups.

It can be found in the shadow of every religion and spiritual system in the world, including mainstream Christianity.

Some of today's biggest cult leaders are TV evangelists whose financial, political and "healing" practices are very questionable, proving that mind controllers don't need the Internet to find people who want to be told what to think.

Second, the truth is that "cults" have always been a part of the American scene.

Little groups of believers who emigrated here — Quakers, Jews, Congregationalists, Masons, Pilgrims — were persecuted in Europe as "scary cults."

That's why they fled to America. Later came the Mormons, Mennonites, Christian Scientists, etc. — all considered very dangerous by the followers of the larger, more established, mainstream cults.

When Catholics emigrated to America in the 1800s, Protestants considered them dangerous and cultish.

Ironically, some of the right wing religious leaders who are today speaking out loudly against the evil of "cults" were themselves considered cultish "Jesus Freaks" in the 1970s.

Their memory about cults is conveniently short.

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